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RHMCSUU/FBI WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 JAKARTA 001011

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SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT CT EXPERT RECEIVES POSITIVE ATTENTION

REF: JAKARTA 00635

Classified By: Political Officer David Willis for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: National security hearings in late February and the ASEAN CT ministerial in early March temporarily renewed a public counterterrorism (CT) dialogue in Jakarta and reenergized the GOI's National CT Coordinator, (ret) Police Inspector General Ansya'ad Mbai. Mbai told us that his late February testimony before the National Assembly (DPR) included an explanation of the GOI's uniquely Indonesian approach to countering terrorism and extremism that eased some concerns over GOI CT strategy, seen by critics as Western-based. Mbai provided us details of his efforts to develop a network of senior Muslim radicals willing to monitor and influence Indonesia's violent extremists. By building such relationships, Mbai hoped to find a way to compensate for shortfalls in the legal system and to influence the extremists. Mbai's potential in orchestrating CT activities remains painfully unfulfilled. A move to elevate Mbai's CT desk to an agency would still be a positive development and may have renewed momentum, but we expect Yudhoyono's reluctance to draw public attention to potentially divisive issues like terrorism and extremism will continue alongside his private support for GOI CT efforts.
END SUMMARY

12. (C) In an early March meeting, (ret) Police Inspector General Ansya'ad Mbai, head of the GOI's CT Coordination Desk, appeared energized by the recent up tick in CT discussions, which frequently placed Mbai in the limelight. He told us that his late February DPR testimony (Ref A) had assuaged several prior detractors, including Ali Mughtar Ngabalen (PBB) and Abdillah Toha (PAN), who had previously claimed that GOI CT programs were part of the "Bush Plan." Mbai said his explanation of Indonesian terrorism and the GOI approach to counter it had convinced critics that the efforts were uniquely Indonesian, with some similarities to the approaches used by other Muslim countries, such as Saudi Arabia.

13. (C) Mbai was skeptical that ASEAN CT discussions held in Jakarta in early March would spawn any effective programs despite optimistic statements by GOI Dept of Foreign Affairs officials. Effectively countering the radical ideology that breeds terrorism, he said, required detailed, concrete measures. As an example, Mbai highlighted New Zealand

assistance that helped the CT Desk publish and distribute moderate Muslim literature to specific pesantrens to decrease the influence of radicals. To further assist this process, Mbai said the CT Desk would soon complete a list of the more extreme doctrines espoused by Indonesian radicals, which he planned to use to identify appropriate material to counter those doctrines. The CT Desk was considering other related programs, including a website to counter the radicals and promote more moderate views.

¶4. (C) To help the CT Desk make up for its lack of any formal program budget, Mbai is constantly on the look-out for new channels of international assistance. During recent meetings with the Saudi and Kuwaiti Ambassadors, Mbai said he bluntly expressed embarrassment that the GOI had to use funding from non-Muslim countries to do something that Muslim countries should be doing for themselves. Mbai indicated his solicitation attracted only modest interest, but added that he had made similar approaches to the Jordanians and Egyptians, and from whom he also requested insight into their deradicalization policy. (Note: A member of Mbai's staff told us separately that Mbai has also met with an Iranian political officer in Jakarta to discuss CT issues. Without elaborating, Mbai described the meeting as disappointing and did not anticipate further contact.)

¶5. (C) The interfaith dialogues promoted by DEPLU and other GOI agencies fail to reach the target audience, Mbai told us, and only involve high level community figures. To be effective, programs should address issues such as employment and basic food and shelter which could help counter the radical fringe; Mbai claimed there were many willing to "switch sides" if they could be assured their families would

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be provided for, a strategy used by some GOI security agencies.

¶6. (C) When we asked Mbai about the recent GOI announcement of a new terrorism wing at the Nusa Kambangan island prison off Java's south coast, he had clearly not been involved in the project, though the prison is slated to open in April. Mbai paused the meeting to call a senior GOI prisons official, who told Mbai that the GOI planned to house all convicted terrorists, as well as those convicted of narcotics and other serious crimes, in the new high security prison. Mbai accepted the official's invitation to tour the prison prior to the opening.

Fighting Fire with Fire

¶7. (C) Mbai explained his strategy to use radical figures, not aligned with Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and violent terrorism, to monitor and counter the terrorists' message. The hundreds of Indonesians currently or previously imprisoned on terror charges and senior Afghanistan veterans should be a GOI recruitment priority, Mbai stated, and could provide valuable insight into Indonesia's radical community. Such a strategy reflects Indonesia's historical comfort level in dissecting extremist networks and splitting ideological hairs to forge ties with the "less extreme" extremists. A committed moderate Muslim and a former Deputy Intel Chief for the Indonesian National Police, Mbai acknowledged this approach had its risks, but told us he remains cautious in selecting and approaching potential recruits.

¶8. (C) Mbai pointed to ex-Laskar Jihad leader Jaafar Umar Thalib as an example of a radical whose assistance might be enlisted. Earlier this month, Mbai told us he participated in a national radio program that included Jaafar and Mhd Mahendratta, a Muslim Defense Team (TPM) lawyer and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir defender. According to Mbai, Jaafar was willing to confront Ba'asyir and groups like Majelis Mujahedin Indonesia (MMI) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). Shadowy former GOI Intel Chief Hendropriyono called Mbai several times after the

program to applaud the effort and to offer his support. (Bio Note: Jaafar, like Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, is an Indonesian of Yemeni descent with a scholarly background in Salafi-Wahabi Islam. He is an Afghanistan veteran (1987-89) and has claimed to have met Bin Laden, though Jaafar has been openly critical of him. Jaafar founded the Laskar Jihad militia, which was actively involved in the Ambon/Moluku conflict before disbanding in late 2002. Jaafar was briefly detained in 2002 for inciting violence, but was declared not guilty by an Indonesian court in early 2003.)

¶9. (C) The GOI's reformed terrorist poster child, Nasir Abas, still listed as a UN designated terrorist, has worked closely with the CT Desk in reaching out to parts of Indonesia's radical Muslim community. In addition, Mbai has developed personal relationships with others who have greater seniority than Nasir and who have helped Mbai to monitor and influence the activities of radicals in strategically important Muslim communities. Mbai said several of them had deep connections to Ba'asyir and Sungkar in the early JI days and were part of the first batches of Indonesians sent to Afghanistan in the 1980s. Some still remain close to older generation JI figures and former jihadi classmates.

¶10. (C) Mbai admitted these contacts were not candidates for sainthood and maintained bona fides universally accepted by JI, MMI and the various Muslim militias found in Indonesia's conflict zones. However, he added that these individuals had not been involved in Indonesia's terror attacks and that top CT investigators had confirmed there was no evidence linking them to terrorism in Indonesia. Mbai told us he personally has given some financial assistance to their families and, a couple of years ago, even paid the required fees for one of these Afghan jihadi veterans to complete his final university exam.

¶11. (C) Some of these individuals link Indonesia's current radical community with its Darul Islam (DI) past and were with JI founders Ba'asyir and Sungkar under DI leader Ajengan Masduki before it fractured, and Mbai has frequently said how

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crucial these links are to identifying and understanding today's terrorists. Mbai regretted that Indonesia's post-Soeharto legal system prevented GOI authorities from taking any action against those with potentially violent ambitions until they were involved in an attack. By gaining access to these radical networks, Mbai hoped to find a way to influence these groups and their operational activities.

COMMENT:

¶12. (C) Mbai has proved himself to be among the GOI's most substantive terrorism experts and an important interlocutor for us. He told us that after his DPR briefing in February, Ngabalen had jokingly suggested to Commission I Chair Theo Sambuaga that the DPR should give Mbai an honorary doctorate in counterterrorism. Nonetheless, Mbai's potential as the GOI's national CT coordinator remains painfully unfulfilled and he is still cut out of some GOI CT discussions.

¶13. (C) Post has told senior Yudhoyono Administration officials that we would view a move to elevate Mbai's CT desk to an agency as a positive development, but we have stopped holding our breath. The draft presidential directive has languished in bureaucratic limbo for over a year awaiting President Yudhoyono's signature. This slow pace is typical of Yudhoyono's languorous approach to decision making that has characterized his presidency. After DPR members in February repeated their calls for Yudhoyono to take action, Mbai sent a formal request to Minister Widodo, the Coordinating Minister for Politics, Law and Security, to again raise the issue of the CT agency. While Mbai's increased public exposure in the past several weeks may have renewed attention to the issue, we doubt Yudhoyono's current

political calculus includes drawing public attention to
divisive issues like terrorism and extremism.

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